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ABSTRACT

Families choose schools; and they choose programs within schools. Yet the processes, contingencies, and outcomes of families' choices of schooling have not been systematically examined. In this paper, the social science literature on families' choices of schooling is reviewed. Treating this choice as a special case of consumer choice, the paper discusses the range of options in schooling, the processes of choosing schooling, and the effects of these choices. Some suggestions for further research on families' choices of schooling are made. (Author)

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THE EDUCATIONAL MARKETPLACE:

Toward a Theory of Family Choice in Schooling*

Draft 2

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ABSTRACT

Families choose schools; and they choose programs within schools. Yet the processes, contingencies, and outcomes of families' choices of schooling have not been systematically examined. In this paper I review the social science literature on families' choices of schooling. Treating this choice as a special case of consumer choice, I discuss the range of options in schooling, the processes of choosing schooling, and the effects of these choices. Finally, I make some suggestions for further research on families' choices of schooling.

Introduction

Families choose schools. Most, perhaps, select the publicly-funded school to which they have been assigned by dint of the location of their residence. Others, however, through magnet school, administrative transfer, and desegregation programs, select publicly-funded schools, such as parochial, military, trade, "free," and community controlled schools.

Some families also choose school programs. Publicly-funded school districts across the U. S. offer families sometimes three or four "mini-schools" within a single neighborhood school from which to choose.

But how and why families choose schools (and school programs) remains virtually unexamined by social scientists, as do the effects of such choice.

Studying the processes, contingencies, and outcomes of families' choice of schools, however, is important, not only in understanding how the present educational marketplace works, but also in formulating and assessing alternatives to the present structure of schooling.[1]

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[1]An understanding of the full nature of families' consumption of schooling would be essential in assessing the merits of such proposed models for the restructuring of schooling as education vouchers (see, for instance, Center for the Study of Public Policy, 1970; Coons and Sugarman, 1971), "public schools of choice" (see Fantini, 1970, 1971), alternative, competing school districts (see Clark, 1969; Wray, 1970), and "open schools" -- schools in which students could subcontract their education to competing persons and organizations outside publicly-funded schools (see Coleman, 1967).

In the first three sections of this paper, I attempt to answer the question: "why do families choose the schools they do?" Section 1 deals with the range of choice options in schooling; section 2 examines the processes of family choice in schooling; and section 3 elaborates on the criteria used by families in evaluating and selecting schools. In section 4 of this paper, I am concerned with the effects of family choice in schooling. In the final section of this paper, I comment on further research on family choice in schooling.

Throughout the paper I draw upon the social science literature on family choice in schooling, some recent and unpublished case studies of family choice in schooling, and my own thoughts and experiences. I believe that this paper does provide a more useful framework for the study of family choice in schooling than previously available. It is my hope that it also provides some of the groundwork necessary for a theory of family choice in schooling.

1. THE RANGE OF CHOICE OPTIONS IN SCHOOLING

The range of options extant in schooling today has never been systematically defined. Critics of the present organization of schooling generally presuppose the limitedness of schooling options; defenders of today's schools point to differences both within and outside of publicly-funded schooling. Indeed, I believe that it is a popular impression that the number of schooling alternatives has proliferated in the last decade.

In this section, I discuss the first two of several determinants of family choice in schooling to be elaborated on in this paper: (a) the number and degree of differentiation of products (schooling alternatives) in the educational marketplace, and (b) various means (choice mechanisms) by which families may make use of those products.

The Number and Differentiation of Schooling Alternatives

The number and kind of options within and outside of publicly-funded schooling varies from school district to school district, from city to city. The schooling alternatives in Eugene, Oregon are considerably different, both in number and in kind, than those in Portland, Oregon; schooling alternatives in Eugene and Portland are different than those in Seattle; all of which are different than those in San Francisco, and so on.

Exactly how many schooling alternatives exist in any given city,

or sets of cities, is an empirical question which has generally not been tackled.[2] I would hypothesize, though, that:

- the number of schooling alternatives within cities varies directly with the size of those cities,
- the number of schooling alternatives within cities varies directly with the degree of socio-economic heterogeneity within those cities,
- the number of schooling alternatives within cities varies directly with the proportion of those cities' populations which was attending post-secondary schooling, and that
- the number of schooling alternatives within cities varies significantly by region of the United States.

The differentiation of schooling options has been studied even less than the number of schooling options (i.e. I am not aware that it has been studied at all). The number of schooling options may have nothing to do with the degree of differentiation between schooling options. A small city could have a few highly differentiated publicly-funded schools and a few highly differentiated non-publicly-funded schools; a city with many schools could have very monotonous schooling options within publicly-funded schools and monotonous schooling options in non-publicly-funded schools (i.e. in a parochial school system operated by a single religious organization). I would hypothesize, however, that, as does the number of schooling alternatives, the degree of differentiation of schooling alternatives varies directly with size of city, degree of socio-economic heterogeneity, proportion of

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[2] School districts in a few cities compile catalogs of alternatives within their districts; and groups in a number of cities, within the last few years, have begun to publish "learning resource directories," but there has been no attempt (that I know of) to compare these data or to collect such data from other cities on a systematic basis.

population attending post-secondary schooling; and that the degree of differentiation varies significantly by region.[3]

Choice Mechanisms in Schooling

Writers on family choice in schooling have acknowledged several ways in which families may select the locus of their children's schooling. Generally recognized are moving the family residence, and sending the children to private school (see Fantini, 1971:92; Fuchs, 1969:55; Benson, in Coons and Sugarman, 1971:4; Friedman, 1962:91; Center for the Study of Public Policy (CSPP), 1970:1-2). Anthony Downs (1970:266) suggests that parents may

> buy entry into suburban schools without moving (in some cases), or actually move into the jurisdictional area of some other school within the big-city system or into a suburban system.

Christopher Jencks, in testimony before the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity (SC on EEO, 1971:10984) points out that

> a number of school districts in northern New England ... do not maintain public high schools but instead provide payments to parents to send their children to either a neighboring high school or private academies, depending on the parents' choice.

The chairer of that committee, Senator Walter Mondale (D-Minn), mentions that native Americans in some states receive Federal monies for their children's schooling, and can choose where to spend it (SC on EEO, 1971: 10984). George LaNoue (1971:144) notes that "dual enrollment permits a student to select his curriculum from two or more learning centers" and

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[3] Constructing a good measure of the "degree of differentiation" between schooling options would most likely be problematic: how does one quantify the relative differences between a particular Montessori school and a particular publicly-funded school on one hand, and a particular storefront school and a particular parochial school on the other?

"exists in almost every state." Coleman (1971:85) suggests an additional set of means available to families: some cities, he says,

> allow free choice at the high school levels. Here, the pupil has a choice among all schools in the city, although schools are not located to make two schools easily accessible to a child.

Many of the above mentioned authors assume, usually implicitly, that there are few, if any, alternatives <u>within</u> individual schools. Downs (1971:267) and Fantini (1971:92) state that what little variation there is within schools is due primarily to chance and personality variables.

Such is the range of choice mechanisms in schooling mentioned in the social science literature. Without claiming that they are generally extant in the U.S., or even in more than a few cases, I would like to suggest several additional ways in which families may select the locus of their children's schooling. In Portland, and likely in other racially heterogeneous cities, it is very easy, indeed encouraged, for racial minorities (in Portland, Blacks) to go to predominantly-Anglo schools and vice versa. It has also been possible in at least two metropolitan areas -- Hartford, Connecticut and Boston -- for inner-city youth to go to suburban schools. Chicago, Portland, Dallas, and probably other urban school districts, have "magnet schools' --schools often, but not exclusively vocational in nature, which students from any part of the school district may attend. Most school districts in Oregon have some form of administrative transfer mechanism, by which families may send their children to schools other than the ones into which they are geographically programmed; some school districts make

it very easy to get such a transfer.[4]

Options are also available to parents and students, with seemingly increased frequency in the past few years, within individual schools, even at an elementary level. Noteable examples are the schools funded through the National Institute of Education's Experimental Schools Program located in Tacoma, Washington; Berkeley, California; Greenville County, South Carolina; Newark, New Jersey; and San Antonio, Texas, as well as schools in the U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity-financed education voucher experiment in Alum Rock, California. It is my suspicion that, in some schools, parents also may request and receive room (and thus, teacher) changes for their children.

Two additional choice mechanisms have been either missed or ignored in the literature on family choice in schooling. First, parents may affect the locus of their children's schooling by not sending them to school -- this is the case of the Amish, who will not send their children to school beyond the eight grade (see Arons, 1972), as well as those parents who have chosen to educate their children at home, outside of any school, and those parents (such as migrant farm laborer parents) who keep their children out of school so that they may work and earn money vital to the families' survival. According to a pair of recent newspaper articles (Keller, 1973a, 1973b), a small but increasing number of families in the Northwest are pulling their children out of publicly-funded schools and either educating them at home or

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[4] During the 1971-1972 school year, almost 2000 such transfers were granted in major Oregon school districts. In four out of the five largest districts in Oregon, more than 80% of the transfer requests received were approved (McMilan, Sonnenfeld, and Jansen, 1972:6-7).

forming "family schools." One particular group, the National Parents League, "fed up with 'paganism and permissiveness' in the public schools," has established 40 such "family schools," half of them in Oregon and Washington (Keller, 1973a).[5]

Second, children may themselves choose not to go to school, or to go to school for only part of the day or part of the year. That many students choose to do this is evident not only from high drop-out rates, but also from low average daily attendance figures (see Nagle, 1971). And there is some evidence to suggest that these, too, are very rational choices: the 1957 U.S. Office of Education study on school drop-outs (USOE, 1957) suggests that most students who had dropped out in the period studied (1951-1954) had dropped out due to economic necessity. There is also evidence which indicates that additional years of schooling makes little difference in the earning capacity of some groups of people -- i.e. non-Anglos (see Weiss, 1970; Hanoch, 1967; Harrison, 1971; Michaelson, 1968): perhaps schooling isn't the best investment a young non-Anglo person can make for herself or himself.

In summary, then, the following types of ways in which families may take advantage of schooling alternatives are extant in schooling today:

1. Choice of alternatives within geographically assigned publicly-funded school. Parents may affect the locus of their children's schooling by either (a) altering the room (and teacher) assignments of their children, or (b) selecting one of several subprograms for their children.

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[5] For a more lengthy and extremely interesting discussion of the idea and rationality of parents selecting education for their children by not sending them to school, see West, 1970:212-218.

2. Transfer, part-time or full-time, to another school in same publicly-funded school district. Without moving, parents may (a) enroll their children in dual enrollment programs (part-time in another school), or (b) enroll their children full-time in a school other than the one within whose area they fall. This would include magnet school, administrative transfer, and desegregation programs.

3. Transfer to a school in another publicly-funded school district. Without moving, parents may have their children attend a school in a district other than in the one in which they reside. This would include both rural to urban tuition exchange schemes and urban to suburban desegregation schemes.

4. Transfer to a non-publicly-funded school. Parents may send their children to a school or schools outside of the public school systems.

5. Move place of residence to another part of same publicly-funded school district.[6]

6. Move residence to another publicly-funded school district.[6]

7. In school/out of school. Parents may decide not to send their children to school; children may decide not to go to school.

Factors Affecting the Range of Choice Options Actually Available to Families

Schooling alternatives are available to families on a differential basis. The CSPP (1970:1-2), H. Levin (1968:34), Ginzberg (1971:379), Benson (in Coons and Sugarman, 1971:4), and Friedman (1962:91), among others, suggest that poor people and some racial and ethnic minority groups have a severely limited range of schooling alternatives available to them -- poor people can afford neither to send their children to private schools nor to pay for housing and property taxes in those areas with "better" publicly-funded schools;

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[6] Either of these could be accomplished without the family ever having to move: it is general knowledge that some students (notably athletes) change their residence, and thus the school where they attend, by moving in with (or telling school officials that they have moved in with) friends or relatives.

information and transportation costs also are a greater burden for poor people than for wealthier people. Non-Anglos are limited even further in their options by their even lower incomes and by their exclusion from certain residential neighborhoods and certain schools.

Some families may have more choice options than other families due to admissions criteria. As Arons (1971:347-349), Ginzberg (1971: 378), and Coons and Sugarman (1970:27) point out, admissions policies (especially at non-publicly-funded schools) may discriminate against people not of certain religious sects, races, or "levels of intelligence." (Although non-Anglos are often discriminated against in school admissions, in some cases they actually are discriminated for: in Portland, for instance, responding to pressures to desegregate, the publicly-funded city school district has placed persons in the community to solicit Blacks to transfer to predominantly-Anglo schools.)

Policies which require families to defend their requests for admission into schools or classrooms may restrict the choice options of some families. According to Partington (1970:43, 44) the

> eloquent and persistent parent, literate and persuasive, who understands the official mind, who knows how to find out for himself what his rights are, is more likely than any other parent to have his way, without necessarily having a stronger case than his more reticent neighbor.

Sonnenfeld (1972:30) speculates that people with lesser amounts of schooling likely cannot wage as effective an argument with school administrators (over obtaining an administrator transfer) as could persons with greater amounts of schooling.

Transportation policies also may restrict options available to some families. School districts may, for instance, provide bussing only to "neighborhood schools," and then only students living greater than a certain distance from those schools.

2. THE PROCESSES OF FAMILY CHOICE IN SCHOOLING

In this section I rough out a model of family choice-making in schooling, building on the framework of a general, decision-process model of consumer behavior developed by Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell (1968). The present model is, of course, subject to empirical verification and modification.

Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell's Model

The decision-process model of consumer behavior developed by Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell (hereinafter referred to as EK&B) "consists of five processes linked in a sequence: (1) problem recognition, (2) alternative evaluation -- internal search, (3) alternative evaluation -- external search, (4) purchase, and (5) outcomes" (EK&B, 1973:46). (See Figure 1.)

Insert Figure 1 About Here

The consuming unit in EK&B's model must (1) recognize a discrepancy between the reality of its situation and its ideals for that situation before it has any motivation to alter the situation. Once such a discrepancy -- a "problem" -- has been recognized, the consuming unit may feel a need to (2 and 3) identify and evaluate alternative

courses of action. Satisfied that, at least given the circumstances, it is knowledgeable enough to make a decision, the consuming unit (4) decides whether to purchase or not to purchase, where the purchase shall be made, and in the case of multiple brands, which brand shall be purchased. But (5) matters do not cease once such a decision is made: "perceived doubt about the wisdom of the action can trigger a search for information to justify the decision; and ... the outcomes may change circumstances sufficiently to serve as a stimulus for further behavior" (EK&B, 1968:49).

Family choice in schooling, being a special case of consumer choice, is easily fitted into the framework of EK&B's model: (1) families recognize discrepancies between the schooling which their children are receiving (or are scheduled to receive) and the schooling which they would prefer; (2 and 3) they search for and evaluate alternative ways of resolving this discrepancy; (4) they select a school; and (5) they experience the consequences of, and reevaluate, their decision.

Active v. Passive Choice in Schooling

Before proceeding, I must distinguish between "active" and "passive" choice in schooling, for it is with active choice in schooling that I am primarily concerned in this paper.

I believe it reasonable to contend that families select schools for their children either actively or passively. Passive choices are defined as those situations in which families do not consider more than one schooling alternative in selecting schools for their children. An example of passive choice in schooling is families automatically sending their children to their local "neighborhood school." Active choices are defined as those situations in which families select a school for their

children only after serious consideration of multiple schooling alternatives.

I assume that there would be no active choice in schooling (a) if all families with children in school were satisfied with those school situations, (b) if families with children entering school had no reason not to send their children to the nearest, least expensive (probably publicly-funded) school, or (c) if all schools were the same. Certainly, however, there is dissatisfaction with schools, and there is product variation in the educational marketplace; hence, I believe that at least some families at any given time are making active rather than passive choices. (Most families probably make both kinds of choices, the particular kind varying from year to year as familial and environmental circumstances change.)[7]

Precipitants of Active Family Choice in Schooling

What, then, brings families to the point of seriously considering multiple schooling alternatives for their children? Two things, I believe, are necessary for this to happen. First, families must recognize that their present schooling situation (or the situation they normally would have selected for the children) is not what they desire (or can afford) -- this is the process of "problem recognition." And second, families must have an expectation that there is a reasonable probability that they could do something about the dissatisfactory situation if they attended to it. Let us consider each of these

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[7] I do not attempt in this paper to address the empirical question of defining exactly when a given family is making an active or a passive choice of schooling. Answering such a question does have its difficulties -- e.g. arriving at an acceptable definition of when a family considers schooling alternatives "seriously" enough to call that consideration "active choice."

necessary conditions in some depth.

Problem Recognition in Family Choice in Schooling. I consider the problem recognition process in two types of cases: where families are (passively) consuming schooling at the time of problem recognition; and where families, because they have recently moved, or because their children are just entering the first grade, are not yet consuming schooling. In the former type, families are changing their consumption; in the latter type, families are establishing their consumption of schooling.

For families who are consuming schooling at the time of problem recognition, problem recognition leads to the consideration of schools other than the schools which their children are attending at the time. By definition, it is assumed that before problem recognition families were relatively satisfied with the schooling they were consuming -- i.e. that the schooling being consumed was the best possible for that family, given family preferences, resources, and market constraints. "Problem recognition," then, implies that something has occured to cause the family to question whether or not the schooling they are consuming at that time really is the best possible schooling they could obtain, given their constraints. Any one or a combination of the following things may happen:

1. The quality of schooling at the schools where families originally consumed schooling may decline. The quality of

schooling at a particular school may decline (a) as the quality of schooling inputs (i.e. the amount of money allocated to the school, the average experience of the teaching staff, the average education of the teaching staff, the teacher-student ratio, the condition of the physical plant, the socio-economic composition of the student population, etc.) declines, or (b), in a relative sense, as the quality of schooling inputs at alternative suppliers of schooling increases.

2. The costs of schooling at the original schools may rise. The costs of schooling at a particular school may increase (a) as the direct monetary costs (tuition, property taxes, incidental fees, transportation fees, etc.) rise, (b) as the indirect monetary costs (i.e. loss of potential earnings while in school, transportation costs) rise, or (c) as the social costs (decreased immediate enjoyment of life; decreased future enjoyment, status, etc.) rise. The cost of schooling at a particular school also (d) may change in a relative sense (i.e. if the costs of schooling at alternative suppliers decreased).

3. Families' perceptions of the quality/cost of schooling at the original schools may change. Through (a) access to new information sources and through (b) knowledgeability of greater amounts of information, families' perceptions of the quality/cost of schooling at a particular school may change. This increased information may also cause families to become aware of alternative sources of schooling with either greater quality for the same cost or lower cost for the same quality.

4. The quality of schooling preferred by families may rise. Families' schooling preferences may change (a) as they perceive a change in the needs of the children, (b) as they change their idea of what philosophy or style of schooling is best for the children, (c) as their aspirations for the children's schooling change, (d) as the parents' social or status aspirations change, (e) as

parents' or children's reference groups change, or (f) as the family becomes aware of new schooling options.

5. Families' ability to meet the costs of schooling may increase or decrease. Families' ability to meet the costs of schooling may change (a) as the family life-cycle changes (i.e. as the parents earn more, as there become more children), or (b) as the family decides to put a greater or lesser portion of their total income into schooling rather than other goods and services.

For families who are not yet consuming schooling, problem recognition takes on different characteristics. Rather than calling previous consumption of schooling into question, problem recognition calls into question expected consumption. Families with children entering first grade and families who have just moved, I hypothesize, "normally" send their children to the nearest, least costly school (i.e. the publicly-funded "neighborhood school") -- thus selecting schooling passively -- unless there are reasons not to. These reasons would be such as the quality of schooling at the nearest school being too low; the costs of schooling at that school being too high; or the style of schooling not meeting their preferences. In other words, for families who are not yet consuming schooling, "problem recognition" is the recognition that the schooling supplied at the nearest school is not in accordance with their demand.

This second type of problem recognition most likely happens as the family obtains greater information concerning the nature of schooling at that nearest school. Information which leads to problem recognition may come from (a) friends, (b) neighbors, (c) colleagues, (d) school personnel, (e) school public relations materials, (f) the news media, or (g) parents' visits to the school.

We now have an inventory of precipitants of active family choice in schooling. Problem recognition may result from the occurance of any one of these precipitants; it seems plausible, however, that the probability of problem recognition being "triggered" increases considerably with the occurance of each additional precipitant. In most cases, problem recognition in family choice in schooling probably occurs over a period of time rather than instantaneously.

The particular occurence(s) leading to active family choice in schooling are important in that not only do they initiate the whole choice process, but they also help determine the particular course of that process. If, for instance, a family is seeking and evaluating schools because they feel that their child is being alienated by the educational philosophy of the school she or he is attending, they are likely to be extraordinarily conscious of educational philosophy as they search; further, they are likely to seek a philosophy other than the one of the present school.

And after problem recognition? Problem recognition is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the initiation of active family choice in schooling. This is true for at least three reasons:

(1) The magnitude of some problems families become aware of may not be great enough to motivate them to do anything about the problems -- it might cost families more to do something about the problems than it would for them to "live with the problems."

(2) Some families do not have adequate resources with which to do anything about problems, even if they are aware of those problems -- e.g. inner-city residents may be aware of the relatively poor quality of schooling in many of their publicly-funded schools, but may not have the time or the financial or political resources to do much about it. If a family has no expectation of being able to do something about a problem, why should it proceed any further?

(3) Using Hirschman's (1970) terminology, families may not attempt to "exit" unless they have failed, or expect to fail, in attempts to "voice" -- in other words, once families have perceived a problem with the schooling they are consuming, they may remain at that school and attempt to remedy the situation before they

actively search for alternative suppliers of schooling.[8]

This then, is the first process of family choice in schooling: the "problem-recognition" process. Families are (or are not) now actively involved in the choice-making process. Once involved, families go through two additional processes before making a choice of schools: they identify a range of schooling alternatives from which they can make that choice (this identification may or may not involve external search), and they evaluate those alternatives.

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[8]Two things should be noted about exit and voice. First, voice can be prohibitively expensive for poor and non-Anglo people. As Areen and Jencks (1971:50) state, "mounting an effective campaign to change local public schools takes an enormous amount of time, energy, and money . . . few parents have the political skill or commitment to solve their problems this way."

Second, the loyalty, or commitment, of a family to each of its members, to their children's schools, and to their neighborhood could play an important part in determining how quick that family is to attempt to leave a less than satisfactory school situation. Hirschman (1970:53) writes that "the importance of loyalty . . . is that it can neutralize within certain limits the tendency of the most quality conscious customers or members to be the first to exit." Putting this in the context of schooling, one would postulate that, to the degree that they are loyal to each other more so than to their schools or to their neighborhood, a family will tend to more readily move out of those school situations or that neighborhood.

For a further explication of the implications of exit, voice, and loyalty, see Hirschman (1970).

The Search Process in Family Choice in Schooling

According to EK&B (1973:375),

> Following the recognition of a problem, the consumer engages in internal search and alternative evaluation. Relying exclusively on information from past experiences, the consumer uses existing attitudes to identify and evaluate alternative solutions to the problem.
>
> Internal search and evaluation can produce three different types of outcomes. First, if the process produces satisfactory results, the consumer may forego external search and proceed to the purchasing process stage. Second, internal search may convince the consumer that there is no viable way of solving the problem and so the process may halt. The third and final type of outcome is that the consumer decides to engage in external search and alternative evaluation.

In external search,

> the consumer uses various sources of external information, such as mass media, personal sources, and marketer-dominated sources (advertisements, dealer visits and so on), to learn about the number of alternative solutions to the perceived problem, the characteristics and attributes of these alternatives, and their relative desirability.

The extent of the search process. Whether or not a consuming unit enters into external search, and how long it continues it, say EK&B (1973:376), depends on the perceived costs and benefits of the process, as well as on the risks involved. Thus we might expect

- families who have just gone through the choice-making process (and were going through it again);
- families who cannot afford the costs of external search;

- families to whom the expected benefits of external search are not great; and

- families who perceive smaller risks in selecting schools

not to prolong (if enter into) external search. Families who have just come through the choice process probably have a considerable amount of information still on hand (unless, of course, they have moved in the interim). External search likely is relatively expensive for some families -- e.g. large families, poor families, relatively isolated families (such as rural families), and those families who have just moved -- and thus less likely to occur. Other families -- i.e. those with the least valuation of schooling, and those who perceived the least amount of differentiation between schooling alternatives -- may not see many reasons to prolong the search process.

Some (see, for instance, Ginzberg, 1971:379) have speculated that poor parents lack a sufficiently high valuation of schooling to make "informed judgements" concerning choice of schools. Data concerning the socio-economic distribution of the valuation of schooling, however, are inconclusive. Coons and Sugarman (1971:16), though admitting the roughness of their measure, cite the fact that poor school districts "often tax themselves at a higher rate than do richer school districts" as evidence that poor people are at least as quality-conscious in regard to schooling as are wealthier people. Butler, et al. (1969:27)

report that families, regardless of socio-economic status, race, or urban/suburban residence, would prefer "a neighborhood with a better than average school system but higher than average tax rate" (78 per cent) to a "neighborhood with a lower than average tax rate, but worse than average school system" (15 per cent).

External sources of information. Information about schooling options may be available to families from a number of sources:

- from neighbors, friends, and colleagues;
- from the direct experience of the children (either children who used to go, or children who are still going to a particular school);
- from the direct experience of the parents (i.e. visits to the schools);
- from testing information provided by the schools or school district;
- from other information provided by the schools or school district;
- from the mass media.

The information-utilizing capacity of any given family is likely to depend both on how much information that family obtains and on its ability to comprehend that information. The number of sources of information a family has access to, in turn, is probably dependent upon the income, social class, and race of the family; the length of the family's residence in the neighborhood; and the extent of schools' and school districts' information programs. Some information is costly -- both in terms of time and in terms of money -- and thus

less available to poorer people and those who work longer and more rigid hours; other information is available only to people with "connections" in the "right" places--it is generally lower class people who do not have access to privileged sources; and some sources of information are more closed for non-Anglo families than for Anglo families (this being a function of both social class and race). The length of a family's residence in a neighborhood is important for obvious reasons--the longer a family resides in an area (up to a point), the more knowledgeable that family will be concerning the school options in that area. Wilder, et al. (1968, cited in CSPP, 1971:11098) studied the impact of the extent of school districts' information programs in several East Coast cities. They found that "an absence of school-structured information activities had virtually no impact on the knowledge of middle-class parents" while significantly reducing the knowledgeability of poor parents.

A family's ability to comprehend information is likely dependent upon both the quality of that information and on the amount of formal or informal education the family has had. There seems to be general agreement in the literature on family choice in schooling that not only is extant information about schooling options available to families sparse, but also it is of poor quality (see Downs, 1970:264-293; 1971: 11088-11113; Ginzberg, 1971:378-389). I suspect that better educated

families are better able to comprehend information about schooling options (how well educated a family is, however, is not necessarily correlated with the number of years of schooling members of the family have had).

The total amount of information about schooling options that families have, then, is dependent upon the extent of the external search, the amount of stored information recalled, the number of information sources extant, and the number of information sources utilized.

The Evaluation of Schooling Alternatives

Having sought out and identified a number (perhaps one) of schooling alternatives, how do families evaluate the various alternatives? Several factors may be involved:

- the relative valuation of sources of information;
- the evaluative criteria used in comparing the alternatives;
- the relative weighting of those criteria;
- the relative importance of schooling and other goods and services; and
- the family decision-making process.

The relative valuation of sources of information. EK&B (1968:408-411) identify a number of factors which may be involved in the relative

valuation of various sources of information. They note that

> (1.) Generally . . . consumers will use the mass media to learn about the availability and attributes of alternatives, and personal sources to evaluate the alternatives. . .
>
> (2.) Unless the consumer is sufficiently confident of the validity of information obtained from a source, he is not likely to use the information even if it has a high predictive value. . .
>
> (3.) Different acquisition costs may be involved in obtaining information from different sources . . . it appears that consumers prefer that source which involves the least cost and effort in order to collect the desired information. . .
>
> (4.) The amount and type of risk perceived by the consumer affects the specific information sources that are utilized . . . the importance of personal sources generally increases as the cost of the item purchased increases. . .
>
> (5.) Certain characteristics of the decision-making unit affect the types of sources used in making decisions. For example, personal sources are typically less effective than others if the consumer is socially isolated . . . There is also evidence that the more the husband and wife's friends constitute separate social networks, the greater will be the influence of those friends relative to other sources. Finally, in those situations where the decision-making process is performed independently by both parties, or by one spouse alone, personal sources will be more important than when other role structures exist.

From this I expect that, to the degree that families have a high valuation of schooling, they value personal (as opposed to mass media) sources in evaluating schooling alternatives. EK&B's hypothesized factors also lead me to predict that, in situations of tension or conflict between various community groups and schools, members of those community groups would tend to disbelieve information distributed by

the schools, while tending to emphasize information supplied by members of their own groups.

Some social scientists believe that the social class of the family making a choice of schooling options is important in determining the relative valuation of information sources. They believe, as Friedman (in Maynard, 1967) puts it, that "the rich are always the tastemakers." Jencks reiterates this point in testimony before the U. S. Senate Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity (SC on EEO, 1971:11010): "the perception of a good school in the poor people's eyes," he contends, "is the school rich people want."

The only bit of empirical evidence concerning the relative valuation of information sources in family choice in schooling comes from the Southeast Alternatives Experimental Schools project in Minneapolis. Sederberg and Alkire (1972:25) report data indicating that parents felt that they had given more weight to information published and distributed by the public schools than information obtained from friends and neighbors.[9]

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[9]It should be noted that the SEA Experimental Schools project had only been in operation for one year prior to the survey in which these data were collected. One possible explanation of the weight parents gave to public school-originated information in this case is that the programs were so new that, in fact, nobody but the public schools knew much about the available schooling alternatives.

The evaluative criteria used in comparing schooling alternatives. The evaluative criteria which families use in comparing schooling alternatives likely vary in both relative strength and number. Families may use one or more of the following criteria: distance from home to school; cost and availability of transportation from home to school; proximity of schools to after-school child care; safety of the route from home to school; the school's program; the quality of the school's teaching staff; the teacher-student ratio; the nature of the school's student body; the nature of the school's physical plant; the "feel" of the school; monetary cost (tuition, fees, etc.) of the school; how many of the children's friends and siblings attend the school; and others. Little is known about which of these criteria are in fact used by families, or about the relative importance of these criteria to families[10]

EK&B see the evaluative criteria as being elements of an "alternative comparison process," in which evaluative criteria are contrasted with product characteristics, resulting in a set of "acceptable" alternatives and a set of "unacceptable" alternatives (EK&B, 1968:451). (See Figure 2.)

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[10]What evidence there is concerning the use and weighting of these criteria is reviewed in section 3 of this paper.

Insert Figure 2 About Here

The relative importance of schooling and other goods and services. The relative importance of schooling and other goods and services may be significant in that if schooling has less importance, the family may prefer to put its energy (or financial) resources into more important goods and services. (In fact, as I mention in the first section of this paper, if schooling has a negative marginal utility for a particular family (as it may for non-Anglos), the family may very rationally decide not to send its children to school at all.)

The family decision-making process. Also of concern in the alternative evaluation process is the relative influence of family members -- to what degree, for instance are the children influential in the evaluation? The amount of influence children have probably varies considerably between families. However, I hypothesize that the amount of influence that children have in the evaluation of schooling alternatives increases as the age of the children increases. Data from Minneapolis tend to support this hypothesis: at an elementary level, 76 per cent of the sample of experimental school parents

responded that they had had the most influence in deciding which school their children would attend -- only 16 per cent responded that their children had had the most influence; at the high school level, only 32 per cent of the parents responded that they had had the most influence (Sederberg and Alkire, 1972:23, 88).

Purchasing Processes in Family Choice in Schooling

The fourth process in EK&B's model of consumer behavior is the purchasing process (see Figure 1). Families at this point have completed (at least temporarily) their search for schooling alternatives, and, having evaluated the various alternatives, have accumulated a set of "acceptable" alternatives and a set of "unacceptable" alternatives. (Either of these sets may contain all or none of the school alternatives considered.) EK&B suggest (1968:445) that

> Purchasing processes produce two major types of outcomes -- "purchase" or "halt." A purchase may occur when the consumer finds an alternative that satisfies his evaluative criteria. The process may halt because there are no alternatives that satisfy the evaluative criteria or because the consumer cannot find them . . .

Presumably, families select that schooling alternative (possibly the school situation they are presently in) which maximizes the net benefits to them. If time and energy are the primary costs of choice-making, and those costs are high, families may select the schooling options which they can select most quickly. Families

who see little difference between schooling options or who feel schooling to be relatively unimportant may make such decisions. If the costs of changing schools (i.e. costs of psychological adjustment, plus additional transportation, tuition and fee costs, if any) are greater than the perceived benefits of changing, then the choice may be made to continue at the original school.

EK&B mention (1968:447) that the purchasing process may be confounded as the consumer enters into the store: some aspect of the store environment may alter the purchase decisions held by the consumer before entering the store. The purchasing act in schooling may be said to take place in that place (usually in the school or school district office) where parents officially enroll their children in schools. If, at this point, parents get into a heated discussion with the school principal, they may decide not to enroll their kids in that school after all.

Post-Purchase Behavior in Family Choice in Schooling

Consumer behavior does not necessarily end with the purchase of a product: consumers may evaluate the product as they use it and may also search for other products. Such continued evaluation or search may result in "postdecision dissonance" (EK&B, 1968:506). Post-decision doubts are likely to occur when

1. The decision is important to the individual in terms of its psychological significance to him, financial outlays, and so on. In other words, he becomes committed to his choice and finds little opportunity to reverse the decision that has been made.

2. The alternatives not chosen have desirable features.

3. A number of desirable alternatives are available.

4. Available alternatives are qualitatively dissimilar -- that is, each has some desirable unique features (referred to in the terminology of dissonance theory as low "cognitive overlap").

5. Perception and thought about unchosen alternatives is undertaken as a result of free will (volition) with little or no outside applied pressure. If pressure is applied, the individual will do what he is forced to do without letting his own point of view or preference really be challenged.

or when an "individual's expectations regarding the product are not confirmed or fulfilled" (EK&B, 1968:512).

In schooling, once families have selected a school many of them may evaluate the quality of their purchases: are they getting what they thought they were going to get? Are they satisfied with what they are getting? To what degree are their ideals not being met? A non-affirmative answer to any of these questions could lead to dissonance, and, in turn, to dissonance-reducing behavior.

EK&B suggest that consumers may attempt to decrease dissonance by (1) "increasing the perceived attractiveness of the chosen alternative and/or downgrading the desirability of those that were not chosen";

(2) "concluding that all alternatives are essentially identical, even though this was not felt to be true during prepurchase deliberations"; or (3) "searching for additional information that presumably serves to confirm the wisdom of the choice" (EK&B, 1968:507-508).

If the dissonance isn't reduced, the entire choice-process may start once again. It seems logical, however, that the choice process does not go on in endless cycles; at some point "choice-fatigue" must become so great that the costs in terms of personal frustration, time and energy drive the family from making any further choices or changes.[11]

I have now completed sketching out a model of the processes of family choice in schooling. I have considered the (1) problem recognition, (2) search, (3) alternative evaluation, (4) purchase, and (5) postpurchase processes in family choice in schooling.

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[11]Choice-fatigue may induce families to attempt , for the first time, or again, to change the dissatisfactory situation from which they had been trying to escape. Of course such actions may lead to, or may be preempted by "voice-fatigue" -- trying to change the situation with few or no perceived results. Cf. Hirschman, 1970.

3. CRITERIA IN FAMILIES' SELECTION OF SCHOOLS

The social science literature suggests four types of criteria which may be used by families in their evaluation and selection of schooling alternatives. These are criteria related to the location of the school, the school program, the school environment, and the monetary costs of attending the school.

Location of the School

Several aspects of schools' location may be important to families choosing schools: the distance from home to school, the safety of the route from home to school, and the proximity of the school to after-school child care. A number of authors cite the distance of the school from the home as being the most important criterion in family choice in schooling. The CSPP (1970:4), for instance, asserts that "most parents will . . . choose schools near their homes even if they have a much wider range of choices." The National Education Finance Project (NEFP, 1971:40), Rhodes (1972:1), Kamman (1972:38), Downs (1970: 288), and Havighurst (1972:50) make similar statements. Jencks (SC on EEO, 1971:10988) qualifies such a conclusion: "If people really perceive a difference between schools," he testifies, "most of them seem to prefer the school which is supposed to be better, even if it is not in the neighborhood . . . a lot depends on the degree to

which the schools become different from one another." The distance from home to school may increase in importance to the degree that additional transportation costs are incurred.

Empirical evidence is sparse. Some of it tends to substantiate opinions such as the CSPP's; other of it, however, seems to point in different directions. Jerdee and Rosen (1973), in a simulation of choice in schooling involving upper-middle class Anglos, found a 45-minute bus ride to be considerably more important than either the socio-economic composition of the student body or the difference between traditional and innovative teaching. Binderman (1972:497), in a study of the choice-making behavior of Black families in a Southern freedom of choice school district, found the perceived difference in distance to the Anglo and to the Black schools to be important in the desegregate/non-desegregate decision-making process -- families generally selecting the school perceived to be closer; the difference in distance perceived, however, was highly correlated with degree of alienation, leaving the significance of this finding unclear. Weinstein and Geisel (1962:25), in another study of Black family choice-making behavior in a freedom of choice school district, found that desegregating families often gave as their chief reason for desegregating their perception that the Anglo school was closer than the Black school.

Reporting about family choice in the Alum Rock voucher experiment, Mecklenberger (1972:24) states that 95 per cent of the parents chose their "neighborhood" schools.[12] In the first of its five years, the Minneapolis Experimental Schools project reports that 74 per cent of the students in the project attended schools in their original attendance areas. The school located in the central of three attendance areas, however, drew 48 per cent of its students from outside of its attendance area (Ravitsch, 1972:5, 6). Dyke (1972:18-19), in first year evaluation of Rochester, New York's urban-suburban pupil transfer program, notes that 27 per cent of those urban students who wished that they went to the city school near their home (47 per cent of all the urban students so wished) did so because they could walk to school, because they didn't like the bus ride, or because the school was closer.

In actuality, families might have hierarchies of distance preferences: Clark and Rushton (1970:491), two economic geographers,

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[12]One reason why there may have been little movement between neighborhoods in Alum Rock is that each school has within it several, often strikeingly different, alternatives: families with diverse needs may have been able to find schooling alternatives suitable to them without having to go to different schools.

contend that "consumers who have not chosen the nearest place do not show any tendency to choose among the other alternatives on the basis of difference." Later (Clark and Rushton, 1970:496), they qualify this, postulating the existance of "spatial indifference zones" -- zones within which consumers would be indifferent to differences in distance.

Several additional location-related factors (at an elementary level only) are suggested by Sonnenfeld (1972), in a study of family choice in the Eugene, Oregon publicly-funded schools: traffic between home and school, safety of route to school, and proximity of school to after-school child care. Sonnenfeld also reports that, for families who had recently moved, distance may have become less important relative to other criteria: some such families requested administrative transfers for their children to the "neighborhood school" in the area from which they had just moved; these requests were, according to parents "so that children could be with their friends" or because "we didn't want our children to have to change schools just because we moved."

School Program

The nature of the school program, particularly the school's general pedagogical approach, the existence of unique course offerings and the quality of the teaching staff, is central to family choice in schooling.

Sonnenfeld (1972) concludes that, at the secondary level, schools' programs (and general environment) were of primary importance in parents' requests for transfers out of or into particular schools. Keller (1972), reporting about a mass exodus of parents from one particular inner-city high school in Portland, notes among other things that

> parents feel the school offers a watered down curriculum . . .if test results, welfare rolls, and dropout rate are any indication, Jefferson needs . . . extra help more than any school in the city . . . Jefferson has had four principals since 1968. Teacher turnover is also high.

School programs seem to have made a significant impact on parental choice of schools in Minneapolis, also. 59 per cent of the parents in Southeast Alternatives reported to the school district that the most important factor in their school selection was the school's program (Sederberg and Alkire, 1972:22). Further evidence of the importance of school program in Minneapolis is provided by Rawitsch (1972:8; 1973:2), who reports that the "most structured elementary option in the Experimental Schools project area" was the only school which lost students; other, "less structured schools" each recorded net gains in the number of students attending them. Similarly in Alum Rock, over 60 per cent of parents in the voucher program opted for new and non-traditional programs -- in spite of the fact that over 95 per cent of them continued to send their children to their "neighborhood" schools (Education Summary, 1972).

In the Rochester, New York urban-suburban pupil transfer program

> Although the stated purpose of the program was the reduction of racial isolation, only one parent indicated this was her reason for enrolling her child in the program. The majority claimed their children were participants becuase they felt the suburban schools offered better educational opportunities (Dyke, 1972:49).

Three psychological factors may influence parents' perception of school quality. Binderman (1972:497) found alienation and feelings of powerlessness to affect Black parents' perception of the differences in quality between Black and predominantly-Anglo schools -- he implies that parents with higher levels of alienation saw fewer differences between the two types of schools. Rhodes (1970:14-15), in a pilot study of parental preferences concerning various levels of school finance, found that the educational expectations of the parents (the parents were parents of children attending a Wisconsin kindergarten) for the children were unrelated to the level of school finance they preferred:

> there was no relationship between the parent's estimate of how much education their child would receive and the concept of educational institution designed to meet the need. Parents seemed to be saying that their child may not be the brightest and may not go the furthest in formal educaiton but their child deserved the best education possible.

School Environment

The nature of the student body, siblings' and friends' attendance at the school, the general atmosphere of the school, and the school's physical plant all are included in the third type of criteria -- in the social and physical environment of the school -- which families may use in

evaluating and selecting schools.

Jerdee and Rosen (1973) found that, for the Anglo upper-middle class parents which they studied, socio-economic composition of the student body was less important than a 45-minute bus ride to school, but more important than the difference between traditional and innovative teaching styles. The NEFP (1971:40) contends that

> observations and interviews indicate that parental judgements with regard to schools tend to be based largely on what they know about the clientele attending a school rather than knowledge of the nature and quality of the educational program.

Whether or not siblings attend the same school may make a difference to families. The NEFP (1971:40) posits that "if they have more than one child, it is likely that few parents will select different schools for each of their children." Empirical evidence regarding the influence of siblings' attendance at the same school is available from three sources. The chief reason that non-desegregating Black families said they had made such a choice, according to Weinstein and Geisel (1962:26), was one of not wanting to separate their children. Recent evidence from the voucher experiment in Alum Rock indicates that over 25 per cent of the families with more than one child in voucher program schools chose different mini-schools for their children (Mecklenberger, 1972). In Minneapolis' Experimental Schools project, 11 per cent of families with more than one child at the same school level selected different schools for those children (Rawitsch, 1973).

Sonnenfeld (1972), in his study of family choice in Eugene, suggests the importance of the location of children's friends in prompting requests for administrative transfers (see page 24). Dyke (1972:49) reports that

> Many older children preferred attending city schools which more of their friends attended, while younger children did not generally express this concern. However, the older pupils are approaching an age when peer acceptance is considered important and issues pertaining both to distance and the number of friends attending suburban schools are questioned.

The general atmosphere of the school and the school's physical plant are noted as significant in parents' attempts to leave an inner-city high school (see also page 24):

> "Parents just don't want to send their kids there, especially black parents . . . They don't like the atmosphere, and they don't think the kids are learning." . . . parents fear . . . interracial hostility (and interracial dating), and discipline problems . . . Then there is the building itself . . . students congegrating at streetside worsen the school's public image (Keller, 1972).

Monetary costs

The fourth type of criteria affecting families' evaluation and selection of schooling is monetary costs. These costs -- costs such as tuition, textbook fees, lunch costs, and transportation fees -- are obviously of importance in the choice process, particularly for poor people. (See page 9 for a discussion of the implications of these costs.)

4. THE EFFECTS OF ACTIVE FAMILY CHOICE IN SCHOOLING

The existence of family choice in schooling is not widely recognized by social scientists and has not been subject to much study. There do exist, however, data from a few situations of active family choice, as well as some speculation. I attempt to review here the little that is known concerning the effects of active (as opposed to passive) family choice in schooling. Two questions seem central: What are the effects on the quality of schooling when parents actively select schools for their children? What are the effects on the responsiveness of the schools as institutions?

The Quality of Schooling

The effects of active family choice on the quality of schooling vary, depending on how one defines "school quality." School quality may be defined in terms of educational inputs (school attendance, quality of peer environment, quality of teaching, quality of school facilities, amount of money spent per student, etc.), in terms of short-term educational outputs (students' learning) or in terms of long-term educational outputs (life-long aesthetic enjoyment, income, etc.).[13]

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[13] Measurement of any of these aspects of school quality is far from being non-problematic. The quality of peer environment is usually measured in terms of the racial and socio-economic composition of the student body, or in terms of scores on standardized aptitude tests. Quality of teaching may be measured by experience (number of years of teaching), by the percentage of teachers with advanced degrees, by teacher-student ratio, or by a subjective measurement of teaching ability, arrived at via classroom observation by experts. Students' learning is usually measured by students' performance on standardized achievement tests. Whether these are good indices is disputed. The long-range impact of schooling has been studied chiefly in such gross terms as earnings and party affiliation.

The racial and socio-economic composition of schools. Evidence suggests that the socio-economic composition of the student body of a school may have significant impact on short-term outputs (see, for instance, Coleman, et al., 1966; Dyer, 1968; Lyle, 1967; Mayeske, 1972). Race, whether as a surrogate for socio-economic status or in itself, has also been shown to have some impact on student learning (see St. John, 1970; Weinberg, 1968) (The effect of either of these variables on long-range schooling outputs is unclear, and, in fact, a matter of considerable dispute -- see Jencks, et al., 1972; Hodgson, 1973.)

LaNoue, (1971:139), Lyon (1971:7), Ginzberg (1971: 374), and Katzman (1971:163-164) suggest that poor-quality schools, particularly those in the inner-city tend to lose middle- and upper-class, Anglo children. Of the three instances where the effects of family choice on the demographic composition of schools have been actually studied in only one case was it found to have had no effect. After the operation of the first year of its voucher experiment, the Alum Rock school district reports that no change in the racial make-up of its schools occured (J. Levin, 1972). Rawitsch (1972:15-21) and Sederberg and Alkire (1972:48, 50) report that schools in the Minneapolis Experimental Schools project became more socio-economically homogeneous after one year of operation. In Eugene, Oregon, it was

parents of predominantly high socio-economic status who utilized the school transfer program -- generally going to certain schools and way from others (Sonnenfeld, 1972:5, 23-24).

Student aptitude. Rawitsch (1972:61-62) reports considerable differences between schools in the average aptitude test scores of children selecting to attend those schools. Fox (1967:61-62), assessing the New York Open Enrollment program, notes that those children who transferred to Open Enrollment schools (the schools to which students were allowed to transfer) were generally brighter than those who remained in their inner-city schools.

Quality of teaching. Fox (1967) also concludes that children transferring to Open Enrollment schools were receiving better quality teaching (as judged by experts who observed the teachers in action in both the sending and receiving schools) than were their peers.

Student learning. Fox notes that children transferring to Open Enrollment schools had a greater improvement in their reading achievement than did their non-transferring peers (Fox, 1967). And, according to Fox (1967), the achievement of other children in receiving schools did not go down. Dyke (1972:48) reports that

> Generally, urban pupils enrolled at suburban schools did not achieve expected gains in reading or mathematics as measured by their performance on NYSPEP (New York State Pupil Evaluation Program) tests. Over one-half of the pupils demonstrated decreasing rates of achievement during the two or three year time differentials that were examined.

The Responsiveness of Schools

A major goal of the various proposals to facilitate family choice in schooling (see fn., page 2) is to increase the responsiveness of schools, particularly public schools, to their clientele. It is generally felt by proponents of these plans (see, for instance, CSPP, 1970; Areen and Jencks, 1971; Friedman, 1962: 85-107; etc.) that by allowing parents to spend their schooling monies where they desire -- and by allowing them to leave (or never go to) dissatisfactory school situations -- the functioning of the educational marketplace would be such that, in the short run, at least some students would end up in better schools, and that in the long run, poor schools would be driven out of the marketplace.[14] Lyon (1971:9), however, warns

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[14] Some educators question whether schools should be responsive to their clientele. Bowers (1970:16-17), for instance, writes:

> At present the school is caught in a situation in which it must, for ideological reasons that both the public and school officials accept, be responsive to the opinions of the people even when these opinions interfere with freedom of thought in the classroom . . . Not all the pressures exerted on school officials are motivated by generosity of public spirit; yet the school board, superintendents and classroom teachers must take these pressures into account -- especially if the interest group is numerically large or powerful in some other way . . . Although the ideology of local control maintains the public's primacy in determining the purpose of education, it is nevertheless essential that the educator address himself to the question of the purpose of education and the kind of institutional structure that would best facilitate its realization. If he does not do this, he will continue to lack the autonomy necessary to protect the classroom from the stifling pressures the public is capable of exerting.

that facilitating family choice is "likely to carry risks of unacceptable variation in the quality of educational services." Partington (1970:40), on the other hand, believes that the claim that family choice leads to increasing disparities between schools is "fraudulent, because this is to say disparity does not already exist."

LaNoue (1971:139) suggests that there is no research to show that public schools are any "better" when in greater competition with private schools. But Areen and Jencks (1972:56) contend that "there is no evidence that Catholic schools have served their children any worse than public schools." Coons, Sugarman, and Clune (1970:66) believe that family choice in schooling leads to "improved" schooling for everyone, coming about particularly through the "better matching of schools and children . . . by the judgments of parents and children than by an impersonal attendance boundary for the neighborhood or the judgment of an expert." H. Levin (1968:35) agrees that "even the poor might experience some improvement in their schooling," but also believes that family choice may "change the relative distribution of schooling opportunities in such a way that present disparities in income and opportunities among social and racial groups would increase." Lyon (1971:8) and Fuchs (1969:56) both believe that family choice tends to hold schools more accountable to parents, particularly to poor and minority parents.

Hirschman and LaNoue suggest some qualifications to the thesis that family choice renders schools more responsive. Differentiating between the responsiveness of the marketplace and the responsiveness of individual schools, Hirschman (1970:51-53, 26-27) suggests that (a) not all schools would be equally responsive, in that

> If one assumes a complete and continuous array of varieties, from cheap and poor-quality to expensive and high-quality, then deterioration of any but the top and bottom variety will rapidly lead to a combination of exits: the quality-conscious consumers move to the higher-price, higher-quality products and the price conscious ones go over to the lower-price, lower-quality varieties; the former will still tend to get out first when it is quality that declines rather than price that rises, but the latter will not be far behind.
>
> . . . voice is likely to play a more important role in opposing deterioration of high-quality products than of lower-quality products . . . If only because of economies of scale, it is plausible that density is lower in the upper ranges of quality than in the lower and middle ranges. If this is so then deterioration of a product in the upper quality ranges has to be fairly substantial before the quality-conscious will exit and switch to the next better variety. Hence the scope for, and resort to, the voice option will be greatest in these ranges; it will be comparitively slight in the medium- and low-quality ranges.

and that (b) exit-causing markets may tend to dissipate consumer dissatisfaction, rather than to focus it:

> No matter what the quality elasticity of demand, exit could fail to cause any revenue loss to the individual firms if the firm acquired new customers as it loses the old ones.
>
> ... A competitively produced new product might reveal only through use some of its faults and noxious side effects. In

> this case the claims of the various competing producers are likely to make for prolonged experimenting of consumers with alternate brands, all equally faulty, and hence for delay in bringing pressure on manufacturers for effective improvements in the product. Competition in this situation is a considerable convenience to the manufacturers because it keeps consumers from complaining; it diverts their energy to the hunting for the inexistent improved products that might possibly have been turned out by the competition . . .

LaNoue (1972:139) suggests that "marketplace analogies do not fit well to the educational world" because

> Private schools . . . do not view increasing their share of the market in the same way corporations do. This severely limits the possibility of consumer accountability. Although there is no research on the matter, the most plausible generalization is that the more desirable the private school, the less the parental accountability.

Downs (1970) posits seven conditions necessary for choice in schooling to be effective in making schools more responsive: (a) the existence of alternative suppliers, (b) the freedom of those suppliers to offer significantly varying products, (c) the existence of consumer control over significant resources, (d) the freedom for consumer preferences to influence resource allocation, (e) the existence of an adequate means of evaluating outputs, (f) the existence of an information system easily accessible to consumers, and (g) the provision for payment of transportation costs.

Other Effects of Family Choice in Schooling

Two additional types of effects of family choice in schooling have been noted in the literature: the effects of family choice on parental attitudes toward the public schools, and the effects of family choice on parental involvement choice-making.

Parental attitudes toward the public schools. Fuchs (1969:55-56), writing about schooling in Denmark, remarks that a significant effect of the existence of "Free Schools" (state-supported non-public schools) is "that they remove much conflict from the public schools" and that "a striking characteristic of Free Schools is the general coincidence of goals on the part of parents, teachers, and administrators, and the harmonious relationships between these groups." She goes on to suggest that "an advantage of a system with publicly supported alternatives is that freedom from the monolithic compulsion of huge bureaucratic organizations may free the public schools of debilitating conflict." Patton and Anderson (1972:63) believe that "parental choice in selecting schools for their children will tend to reduce the anti-schools sentiment that has developed in recent years." In Minneapolis, where high school parents have fewer options to choose from than do elementary school parents, high school parents report a higher degree of dissatisfaction with the school district than do elementary parents (Sederberg and Alkire, 1972:10).

Parental involvement in choice-making. Partington (1970:40), Fantini (1971:93), and Rowley (1969:157) posit that, when parents are given greater opportunities to select schools for their children, not only do they become more involved in choice-making in schooling, but they also become more knowledgeable and competent decision-makers in general.

The CSPP (1971:11094-11096) speculated that parents, as they are given greater choice in schooling

> will probably want several kinds of school information that will facilitate between-school comparisons, judgments about whether individual schools are living up to their unique claims, and qualitative school information . . . such as other people's perceptions of school atmospheres and teacher attitudes.

This view tends to be corroborated by Almen (1972) who reports evidence that, in Minneapolis, as parents have taken on greater responsibility for selecting their children's schools, they have perceived the need for, and demanded, more and better information concerning the publicly-funded schools.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

I have now completed my discussion of family choice in schooling. It is probably strikingly apparent to the reader of this paper that the evidence on family choice in schooling is almost non-existent. There has been systematic examination of neither the range of choice options extant in schooling today, the process of family choice in schooling, families' evaluative criteria in selecting schools, or the effects of family choice in schooling.

What I have attempted to do in this paper is to rough out several aspects of the processes, contingencies, and outcomes of family choice in schooling, both to provide a more useful framework for the study of family choice in schooling than previously available, and to provide some of the groundwork necessary for a theory of family choice in schooling.

A major motivation for me to write this paper is that, due to a forthcoming change in my personal circumstances, I do not plan, for several years at least, to continue my examination of family choice in schooling. I very much would like to see others become interested in the subject and pick up the ball and run with it.

The research possibilities seem endless. Of particular value, I believe, would be an extensive ethnographic study of families actively involved in choosing schools for their children. Such a study might best be done in locations where families have the opportunity to choose various schools within publicly-funded school districts.

Minneapolis; Berkeley and Alum Rock, California; and Eugene, Oregon would be excellent sites.

An ethnographic study would be valuable in that, if well done, it could give us an insight into both families' definitions of the reality of choice in schooling (potentially a long way from the definitions of social scientists, as cited in this paper), and family decision-making processes (which social science knows so little about in any context).

A second methodology which could prove fruitful in the study of family choice in schooling is the survey research methodology developed by Bock and Jones (1969) and applied to family choice in schooling on a test basis by Jerdee and Rosen (1973). In the technique, called "factorial paired comparison," schools are created, differing on one or more of several attributes, and then paired; respondents are asked to choose between pairs in a structured sample of each possible pair of schools (Jerdee and Rosen, 1973:2-3). The analysis, though complicated, leads to some very neat indices of the relative value of various criteria in the choice of schools. Because it requires trade-offs to be made, rather than simply asking for a rank-ordering of valuation of criteria, the method seems to be of particular usefulness. (See also Jones and Jeffrey, 1964; and Richardson, 1966 for a further explication of the "factorial paired comparison" technique.)

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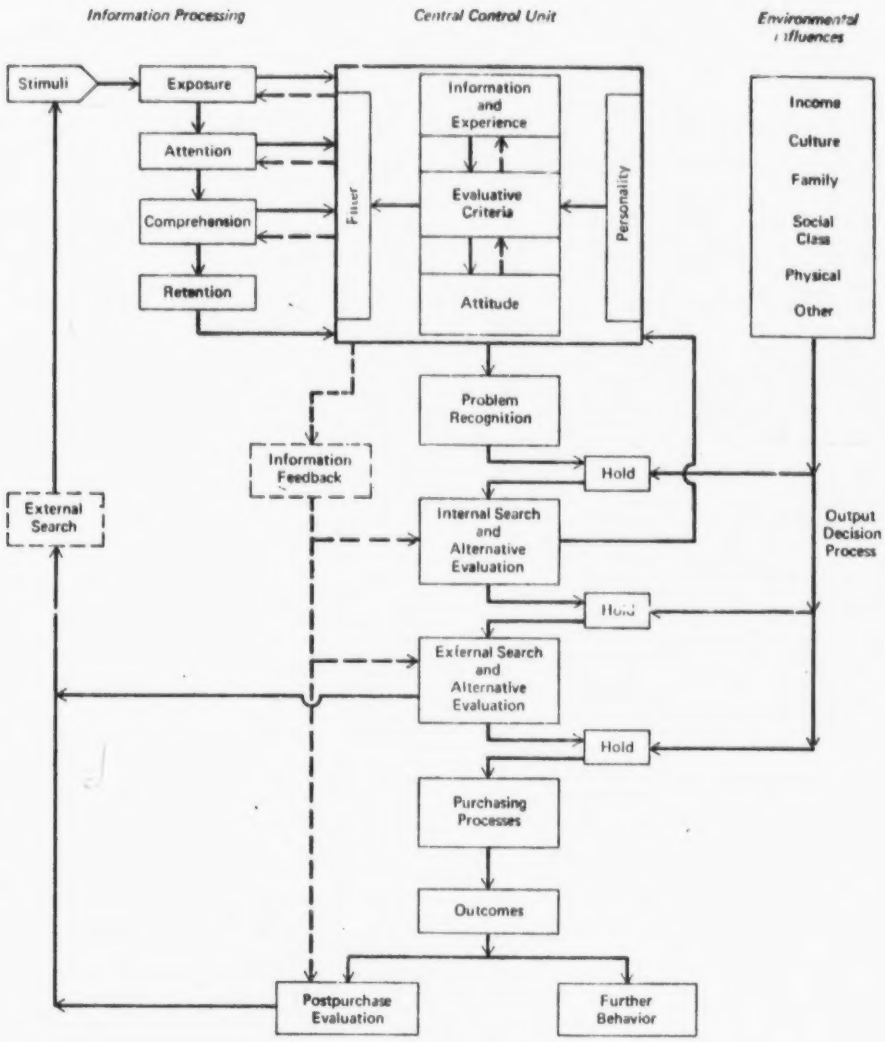

Figure 1. Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell's Decision-Process Model of Consumer Behavior (1973:58)

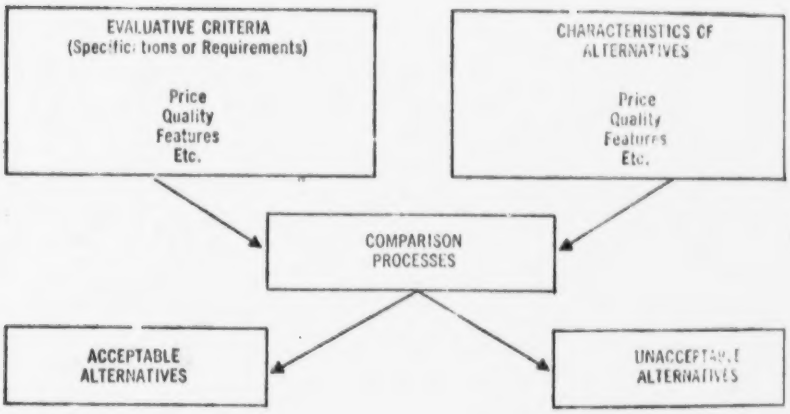

Figure 2. Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell's Model of the Alternative-Evaluation Process